

AMATEUR CUP semi-finalists last year, Wycombe Wanderers, crashed out of this season's competition in the first round on Saturday at the hands of Athenian Leaguers Cheshunt at Loakes Park. A goal down after two minutes, Wanderers lost skipper John Delaney six minutes later and spent the rest of the game searching for an equaliser that never materialised.

But the elusive goal just wouldn't come—as has been the case so often with Wycombe all season. Numerous chances were created—including three for Mick Holifield in a hectic final five minutes.

Wanderers did everything else but score. Their work rate on Saturday was 100 per cent, they were streets ahead of Cheshunt on ability and they had the added incentive of a large, vociferous crowd behind them.

The stage was set perfectly for the Blues to make up for their indifferent Isthmian League form this term. But in only the second minute they made an elementary error—and paid dearly for it. A few minutes later, fate struck another telling blow when Delaney was stretchered off. The injury was not as serious as first thought, damage to a nerve in his leg which will keep him out of football for at least two weeks.

Inevitably Delaney's injury did much to upset Wycombe plans and perhaps the most crucial loss was Big John's scoring threat from dead ball situations.

A glaring mistake after only 120 seconds of the match gave Cheshunt a gift goal and an ideal start. From a throw-in the ball was worked into the Wycombe penalty area. Kevin O'Brien called for the ball but Delaney chose to clear and it went straight to John Poole on the edge of the box. With O'Brien off his line, he carefully steered the ball home with a lofted drive into an empty net.

By STUART EARP, Wycombe Wanderers 0, Cheshunt 1

Delaney's error gave the visitors a tremendous boost and in the eighth minute Wycombe wilted again when Delaney was tripped going forward. The centre-half fell badly and had to be stretchered off.

Alan Gane dropped to full back while Dave Bullock took over as twin centre back with Rob Williams. Johnny Hutchinson came off the substitute's bench to fill Gane's position in midfield.

He didn't take long to stamp his mark on the game. In the 15th minute neat work by Amos and Horseman put Hutch through but his left foot shot sailed fractionally wide.

Throughout the first half the 1,809 crowd were growing increasingly dissatisfied with referee G. Keep who allowed Cheshunt to waste time persistently. About the only players who were spoken to, in fact, were in blue shirts—Williams and Pritchard both getting warnings after complaining about the visitors' repeated tactics of kicking the ball away.

To their credit, Wanderers soon shrugged off the absence of Delaney and began a concerted offensive on the visitors goal. Tony Amos was causing a good deal of trouble in the centre forward role, jumping well and laying the ball off with some useful flicks. But

without doubt Wanderers missed the services of Keith Searle.

It was Amos who was only inches away from a Wycombe equaliser when he slipped in front of goal and his weak shot was blocked by Cerasoli. Five minutes later keeper Dave O'Neill dived well to clutch a flick header from the centre forward.

Cheshunt's only threat in attack came from John Cerasoli, who played in Ilford's 2-1 defeat of Wycombe in September. It was his long range shooting that relieved the continual Wycombe pressure but for the most part the visitors were fighting a desperate rear-guard in defence.

In the 40th minute Hutchinson dribbled past three defenders but his shot was blocked and from the corner O'Neill managed to gather the ball after a goalmouth scramble.

But the best chance of an equaliser came in the 46th minute. Tony Horseman controlled the ball well and slipped it to Holifield who blazed high over goal. It was the first of a string of squandered opportunities by Holifield who seemed destined not to score on his return to the side.

So after 49 minutes' football, Wanderers still had nothing to show for their efforts. At half time one had the feeling Cheshunt must crack under the con-

tinual bombardment but they survived time and again.

With Pritchard working like a demon in midfield the blues were ensured an abundance of possession but the front runners just couldn't get the ball in the net. Cheshunt brought nine players back into defence, leaving only O'Donoghue and Twigg upfront. Their occasional attacks were efficiently dealt with the home defence where Williams looked back to his best form.

In the 64th minute it seemed that Wycombe must score when first Holifield and then Pritchard had shots blocked. Pritchard twice saw his efforts blocked on the line and Horseman eventually finished the blitz with an overhead kick over the top.

Although Wycombe began to look ragged as the equalising goal became more and more elusive but they were again in with a good chance in the 72nd minute when the referee awarded an indirect free kick only eight yards from the Cheshunt goal line.

A ten man wall stretched virtually right across the whole of the goal and Amos's drive was predictably blocked. Then in the 75th minute Horseman almost made it 1-1 but O'Neill, whose handling throughout was excellent, came out to smother his goalbound shot.

Cerasoli relieved the continual bombardment on the Cheshunt net with a long range effort in the 81st minute which Kevin O'Brien was forced to tip over for the visitors' only corner of the half.

No less than three chances fell to the unfortunate Mick Holifield in the final five minutes. His first opportunity was difficult, the ball bouncing badly but his drive ballooned over the crossbar.

Then in the 88th minute Holifield headed weakly towards the goalkeeper and his final effort in the 90th minute came to nothing when he failed to connect with a Hutchinson cross.

But in between these opportunities Cheshunt almost put the match beyond Wycombe's reach when Twigg hit the post and Dave Bullock was just in time to clear off the line as Mel Lawrence closed in.

So as hundreds of disappointed fans trooped away they were left with the thought that Wanderers may now have only one final chance to win the Amateur Cup again—next year before the distinction of amateurs and professionals comes into effect.

WYCOMBE: K. O'Brien, D. Gamblin, D. Bullock, R. Williams, J. Delaney (sub J. Hutchinson 10 mins), A. Gane, K. Jameson, L. Pritchard, M. Holifield, A. Amos, A. Horseman.

CHESHUNT: D. O'Neill, T. Dillon, E. Marjoram, J. Cerasoli, D. Sharkey, M. Bevans, J. Poole, D. Cooper, M. Lawrence, N. O'Donoghue, P. Twigg, sub G. Berryman (not used).

Half-time: 0-1 Goalscorers—Cheshunt: Poole (2)

Referee: G. F. Kemp (London). Attendance: 1,809.